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ABSTRACT

This placement test is intended to help teachers conduct oral and literacy assessment when placing adults into English as a second language (ESL) programs. The 15-item oral assessment, which consists of three 5-item series, includes questions relating to students' backgrounds and goals that are designed to determine whether the students' English conversational skills are presently at a beginning, intermediate, or advanced level. The literacy assessment, which also consists of 15 questions eliciting information pertaining to students' backgrounds and goals, is intended to determine whether a student (1) is literate in his or her native language and (2) has some writing skills in English. (MN)

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ADULT LITERACY and BASIC EDUCATION
Volume 7, Number 1, 1983

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE*

ESL Placement

First impressions are important in establishing a positive relationship for assessment and placement. Adult students often come to the ESL classroom with many fears. Consequently, it is very important that the teacher establish a friendly, enthusiastic rapport free of any academic pretense.

Oral Assessment

The most common method of assessing adult student's oral proficiency in order to place them in appropriate classes is to engage them in a brief oral interview. For nonliterate students this approach is particularly valuable. Appropriate questions for the oral assessment process are enumerated in the Oral Assessment portion of the instrument.

At all times be relaxed and friendly with your adult students. Make them feel comfortable. Reassure them that this is for placement purposes only and it is *not* an examination. Repeat the question or statement if necessary. You may clarify a response or even prompt the student to help them feel more at ease. If they give a correct and clear answer in English, give them two points for each item. If they give an unclear, inappropriate answer give them one point. For no answer give them a zero. Add up their points for a total score.

Students with a total score of about 0–10 should probably be placed in a beginning ESL class. Those with scores of about 10–20 should be in an intermediate class, and those who score above 20 should be in an advanced class. These scores are only estimates, and the examiner must use judgment in determining the class which could be appropriate for each individual, especially those whose scores fall near the breaking points.

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*This four-page insert is designed for immediate use by practitioners. Simply remove and use. Our thanks is extended to Mark Walsh for sharing this instrument. Practitioners are encouraged to submit their ideas for this section of the journal. — The Editors

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TEXAS A&I UNIVERSITY*
ESL PLACEMENT

ORAL ASSESSMENT

Directions: Introduce yourself, and engage your student in friendly conversation before you begin. Explain that the purpose of the assessment is placement and not an examination.

BEGINNING LEVEL

1. What is your name? ___
2. What is your address? ___
3. Are you married? ___
4. How many children do you have? ___
5. Where were your born? (Write in country) ___

INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

6. What day is today? ___
7. How long have you lived in this city? ___
8. Do you have a job? Where do you work? ___
9. What kind of work do you do? ___
10. What do you need to study? ___
    (Check the appropriate items)
    Speaking English_____
    Reading English_____
    Writing English_____

ADVANCED LEVEL

11. Did you attend school in your native country? ___
    How long? (Write in years)
12. Have you studied English? ___
    How long? (Write in years)
13. Why do you want to study English? ___
14. What do you do in your spare time? ___
15. Tell me something about your family. ___

TOTAL ___

*From Graham, R.C., & Walsh, M. M. *Adult Education ESL Teachers's Guide*. Kingsville, TX: The South Texas Adult Education Center, Texas A&I University.

LITERACY ASSESSMENT

Directions: Encourage your student to write the answer to the questions in the space provided. Repeat that this is not a test, rather it is an assessment of their current level of proficiency. They may answer the questions in English or their native tongue.

1. What is your name? _____
2. What is your address? _____
3. Are you married? _____
4. How many children do you have? _____
5. Where were you born? (Write in country) _____
6. What day is today? _____
7. How long have you lived in this city? _____
8. Do you have a job? Where do you work? _____
9. What kind of work do you do? _____
10. What do you need to study? _____
11. Did you attend school in your native country? _____

    How long? (Write in years) _____
12. Have you studied English? _____

    How long? (Write in years) _____
13. Why do you want to study English? _____
14. What do you do in your spare time? _____
15. Tell me something about your family. _____

Literacy Assessment

In addition to oral assessment and placement, it is very important to assess the literacy skills of your adult students. There are two aspects to this assessment. First determine if the student is literate in his/her native language. Second, find out if the student has some writing skills in English.

To assess the literacy skills of the individuals you are interviewing, ask them to write the answers to the questions that appear in the literacy assessment portion of the instrument. Encourage the students to write their responses in either English or their native language whichever they find easier. At this point you may need to adapt the instrument to fit the language needs of your students; e.g., for Spanish-speaking adults you may write *Como se llama?* in the space under question number one. In addition, you may need to find volunteer interpreters to help you assess the native literacy levels of students from various foreign countries.

It is important to make your students feel comfortable. Repeat the fact that the purpose is only to place the student in an appropriate class. Encourage them to answer as many as possible. NOTE: Be sure that the students write their own answers to the questions on the page. Sometimes the relatives or friends may want to help the student. Obviously, this totally defeats the object of the assessment process.

The literacy assessment instrument is not to be used as a diagnostic tool; rather its purpose is to distinguish the literate adult student from the totally nonliterate student. ESL curricula for these two very distinct groups must be developed to meet their specific needs.

If you find that you have a group of students who are somewhat literate in English, then you may need to evaluate their literacy level. There are a number of ways to do this. You may want to administer a cloze procedure or a dictation test. For more details consult the *Adult Education ESL Teacher Guide* which is available from the South Texas Adult Education Center at Texas A&I University in Kingsville, Texas 78363.